

Terrorism in Russia: possible implications for Ukraine

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Some of the post-Soviet regions have been facing a new challenge: local and international terrorism. The phenomenon is relatively new and very complex; therefore, it demands a thorough study. However, one thing can be said for certain: the reasons for the outburst of terrorism are linked to the whole host of issues and intersections of interests, and are rather specific in every individual case. Usually, in post-Soviet countries the terrorism, the climax of the conflict, derives from inter-ethnic conflicts and clear political causes. Specific actors include political and religious factors, strategic interests, and wishes to achieve certain psychological effects. All terrorist acts have a common terrible toll: they claim lives of people who are in no way connected to the conflicts.

Within the recent months, Kyrgyzstan and Russia suffered from massive terrorist attacks. At the end of July, Uzbek guerillas who are fighting against the political regime of Uzbek president Karimov crossed the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and entered Kyrgyzstan. They captured hostages and demanded money, release of members of the Islamic movement kept in Uzbek prisons, and the permission to cross the Uzbek part of the Fergana valley. Two waves of attacks resulted in capturing a number of hostages. On August 15, the Uzbek military aircraft bombed selected areas in Kyrgyzstan but missed the terrorists, killing 5 and wounding 280 civilians instead. Armed clashes took place in Kyrgyz mountain areas of the Osh region, followed immediately with the exodus of over 5,500 refugees. The situation in Russia has become particularly acute. In July 1999, well-armed guerillas launched a series of attacks in Dagestan. Gradually, Russian federal and Dagestani troops forced the guerillas, mainly Chechens and Islamists out of their strongholds on the Dagestani territory. However, the warfare was not stopped. In early September, a wave of terrorist attacks swept through Russia, the most remarkable of them being the explosion of apartment houses in Buynaksk, two buildings in Moscow and a building in Volgodonsk of the Rostov region, near a new nuclear power plant. Hundreds of people were killed. The official Grozny claimed no responsibility for the explosions, arguing that the terrorist attacks have been performed by the forces that have occupied regions in Dagestan. The situation remains complicated. From time to time, the security forces in Moscow find locations where explosives are stored; panic spreads among the Russian population. The Russian government has not announced the full emergency situation in the state. However, speaking to the media a few days ago, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stated that "In Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia we are dealing with international diversants". He argued that those forces, "under the disguise or cover-up of religious slogans, the banner of Islam, are trying to establish their own, so-called order." According to analysts, the terrorist attacks in the Russian capital will have a strong impact on the whole country. Among other things, they may cause putting the entire federal security forces on the alert and resulting unforeseen increase in budget spending. The political side of the problem is further complicated by the forthcoming general election to the Russian parliament, the State Duma. Hence, the state authorities are facing a serious challenge: within a relatively short period of time they will have to prove their ability to protect the citizens from terrorism. Otherwise their credibility will be severely damaged, and the social-political situation in Russia will further deteriorate. Meanwhile, there are no legal grounds for the introduction of the martial law, or the state of emergency, on the whole Russian territory, though selected regions may find themselves under special attention of security forces and the military.

While the developments in Russia do not go beyond the country's internal affairs, they cannot but have an effect on Ukraine. Is Ukraine threatened by the Russia-based Islamic terrorists? Is there a real threat of the "export of terrorism" from Russia to Ukraine? How the crisis in the Caucasus can be used in Ukraine on the eve of the presidential election? These issues are broadly debated in the Ukrainian policy-making community.

Following the explosions in Moscow, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma commented on the facts by stressing that international events position themselves onto the Ukrainian realities. On September 14, 1999, Leonid Kuchma signed a special statement, a Directive stipulating that "We have no right to ignore the possibility of penetration of international terrorism from the outside". "Therefore, in order to prevent possible unlawful attempts to coerce or destabilize our society, I ordered the SBU [i.e., the Security Service of Ukraine], the Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Defence to carry out the whole complex of relevant measures, aiming at enhancing public security and protection of objects of special importance", the President motivated his actions. Hence, "elements of the state of emergency" have

been introduced in Ukraine. Specifically, the "elements" include enhanced street patrolling and stricter security measures at military sites, local police stations and military formations' arsenals. According to Ukrainian Interior Minister Yuri Kravchenko, borderguard troops have been ordered to be more vigilant in dealing with migrants and individuals arriving from "hot points" of the former Soviet Union.

According to Mr. Kravchenko, a number of actions that will work for prophylactics and enhance public security will be taken by all law-enforcement structures. "We all understand that the pressure of the Russian Federation's repressive machine may result in aggravation of migration processes directed towards Ukraine, and certain actions of preventive nature will be put in place," he added.

The developments provoked mixed feelings and comments in Ukraine. Chairman of the parliamentary Committee for National Security and Defence Hryhory Kriuchkov sarcastically described the Directive as "something new in the practice of state-building". Simultaneously, deputy head of Leonid Kuchma's campaign staff Dmytro Tabachnyk, MP, architect of Mr. Kuchma's presidential victory in 1994 and former presidential chief of staff argued that the President had spoken "only about elements of the state of emergency in the economy". Many Ukrainian analysts and Leonid Kuchma's competitors in the presidential race tend to view the field of applying the Directive as much broader than stated. One of the presidential candidates, Yevhen Marchuk, MP, warned of the "danger of injecting the atmosphere of fear and frightening people in the society." "The current power-holders, with the silent blessing of the President, are trying to show the society that they can take it into the "hedgehog gloves" of fear and obedience. By frightening people with possible terrorist attacks in Ukraine, like the ones in Russia, they [i.e., the authorities] dangerously balance between law and morals or, more precisely, between unlawfulness and amorality," Yevhen Marchuk argued.

Hence, some analysts argue there is a potential challenge in the introduction of elements of the martial law in Ukraine, and suggest the move may be damaging for the political situation, the forthcoming presidential election. Some argue that if the situation deteriorates, in theory, the election may be postponed or cancelled. Among gloomy forecasts of the impact of the current North Caucasian crisis in Russia is the suggestion of one of major opposition publications, Den, that borderguard troops, given the order to be especially vigilant when letting foreigners in Ukraine, may extend their "special attention" to include international observers, invited by the incumbent president's competitors of the Kaniv Four to monitor the election process. In any case, the chance to introduce the emergency situation appears to be rather useful in the context of the election process. Meanwhile, reality seems to be more complex than political scenarios, and further development of the situation may have a significant impact on the political situation in Ukraine and the Ukrainian-Russian relations, particularly when the issues of the common border and migration are concerned.